

For a number of years, the Royston Rotary Club has been helping to support a remarkable project known as Woza Moya, Embocraft, in Kwa/Zulu Natal (South Africa) which has helped to transform the lives of communities devastated by poverty and an epidemic of Aids.

David Blundell and his wife Diane, who have family links in the area, have just returned from one of their regular visits both to Woza Moya (Come, Spirit of Change in the IsiZulu language) and to the nearby Hillcrest Aids Centre.

“We never fail to be both moved and inspired by the project and those involved. It’s story in itself remarkable and a model example of the way that South Africans have found to help one another in tough times,” he says.

The story began in 1986, when Brenda Locke, a housewife, saw the poverty and unemployment in the community surrounding her in the Valley of 1000 Hills and decided that she must do something about it. She persuaded 3 African women to attend a sewing class in a disused stable on her property and the following day 7 more arrived. By the second week she had 60 women. She taught them everything from basic garment making on a sewing machine to embroidery, patchwork, weaving and dyeing.

Her mission was to give needy people who have little chance of finding employment the means to earn a living to support themselves and their families.

As encouragement to the women who did not have a sewing machine, Brenda agreed to buy whatever they made by hand. Soon, she had a stockpile of garments, cushion covers, place mats and bags. The next step was to open a shop and Embocraft was born. With funding from supporters including the local Lions Club and Hillcrest Rotary she was able to set up a new workshop and showroom.

Today, the project supports more than 350 crafters, many of whom have 5 to 10 dependents, teaching a wide range of skills from sewing and beading to welding, carpentry and computer skills. Sewing – making clothes, school uniform etc - still forms an important part of the project and those taking part are presented with a machine at the end of their course. Royston Rotary is particularly proud to have been able to provide funds for a number of these machines.

Inevitably, a number of those taking part will be HIV positive (infection rates are around 40 per cent) and the project organisers emphasise that “We have found that being financially secure gives our crafters hope, and the luxury of looking to the future; because of this they take ownership of their disease and fight to stay healthy.”

“It isn’t all serious, though,” David emphasises. “One of the biggest events of the year for Embocraft and its supporters is the “Gogo (grandmother) Olympics”, for which up a thousand women are presently training.”

The Olympics are part of a support programme helping grannies to stay healthy and strong-minded. They are an opportunity for gogos to compete in rugby, soccer, netball, volley ball, rope-skipping, high jump and more.

Most of the elderly women taking part are members of the Hillcrest Aids Centre's Granny Support Group, says programme manager Cwengekile Myeni. "It helps grannies who are heavily burdened by the HIV pandemic," Myeni says. "Many of them have to take care of grandchildren who have lost their parents."

Woza Moya Embocraft and the Aids centre both send greetings to the Royston Rotary Club.

"A huge thank you for your support," says Anthea Jansen, the CEO at Embocraft. "It is only through the generosity of people such as Rotary that we can carry on our work of bringing hope to the lives of our people."



David B at Woza Moya Embocraft with craft workers





A break from training for support workers at Hillcrest Aids centre

Welding class at Embocraft

